

Europol responds positively to the European Ombudsman's inquiry into public access to documents

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European Law Enforcement Organisation **Europol** has responded positively to an own-initiative inquiry by European Ombudsman, **Mr. Jacob Söderman**, into public access to its documents. Europol's director, **Jürgen Storbeck** informed the Ombudsman that individuals already have a right of access to the information that Europol holds about them and expressed willingness to adopt rules on public access to documents before the end of 1999. Mr Söderman welcomed Europol's positive stance saying: *"For any modern European administration, it is important to have the confidence and the support of European citizens. For Europol, such confidence is even more important in carrying out its mission to make a significant contribution to the European Union's law enforcement action against organised crime, with a particular emphasis on the criminal organisations involved. Even though Europol is not a Community institution but an organ set up in the framework of the third pillar, it is vital that from the beginning it undertakes to comply fully with the principles of good administrative behaviour. The very nature of police work necessarily involves handling information and documents which, in the interests of citizens, must be treated confidentially. However this fact should not prevent Europol adopting rules on public access to documents, adapted to its own situation, as other institutions and bodies have done."* Mr Söderman accepted Europol's proposed timescale for the adoption of rules as reasonable, taking into account the fact that the organisation only formally took up its activities on 1 July 1999. Europol, based in the Netherlands at The Hague, aims at improving the effectiveness and co-operation of police forces in the Member States in preventing and combating terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international organised crime. Europol was brought within the Ombudsman's mandate by the Treaty on European Union, Article 41, as amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam. *For further information, please call Mr Ian Harden, Head of Secretariat, tel. + 33 (0)3 88 17 23 84.*